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ABSTRACT

This series is intended for music educators and features speeches and articles by leaders in music and arts education on a wide variety of current issues. This publication deals with the move of the music education profession to a position based on aesthetic considerations. The study of music structure and history must be encouraged to enhance appreciation of real music, which is the best material for music education. Establishing a realistic rationale to that end requires two tasks. First, a justification for the music program that is understandable and convincing to laypersons must be established. In this regard, eleven statements having to do with benefits of participating in a music program are cited and include engaging imagination and creativity, discovery of talent level, social participation preparation, self-confidence development, and direct effects on the school as a whole. Second, guidelines for organization and conduct of the music program consistent with its unique character of music and musical experience must be developed. Some caveats for the future and criteria for evaluation of the music program conclude the thoughts presented. The paper includes a selected list of Music Educators National Conference (MENC) publications. (TRS)

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WORDS OF NOTE

A REALISTIC RATIONALE FOR TEACHING MUSIC

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By Charles Leonhard

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WORDS OF NOTE

This new MENC publication series is for music educators interested in getting quick, on-target information, trends, and opinions to share with their colleagues, PTA groups, civic organizations, administrators, and others. *Words of Note* features speeches and articles of substance by leaders in music and arts education on a wide variety of current issues.

WORDS OF NOTE

A REALISTIC RATIONALE FOR TEACHING MUSIC

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Reston, Virginia 22091

The problems that music educators face every day arise from financial difficulties, reductions in force, the cry of "back to basics," and other conditions in education and public policy. In my lifetime, the music education profession has moved from almost total reliance on external and instrumental values of music education to a position based on aesthetic consideration. The former position was often characterized by inane statements such as, "The boy who blows a horn will never blow a safe." Current statements are often so vague and esoteric that few people can understand them, especially laypersons.

Positive Forces

Amid all the difficulties we face in the 1980s, there are positive forces at work. The spate of reports on American education from prestigious panels and commissions has resulted in unprecedented statements of support for the arts in education, statements that should be useful to us in establishing more convincingly than we have in the past a viable justification for music education.

The Paideia Proposal,[1] produced by a panel of educators and scholars chaired by Mortimer Adler, presents the position that the goals of schooling should encompass "not just earning a living but living well." It also proposes that all people should be enabled to enjoy as fully as possible all the good that makes

1. *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto.* By Mortimer J. Adler on behalf of the members of the Paideia Group (New York: MacMillan, 1982).

human living worthwhile. The panel members maintain that all people should learn to enjoy and admire works of art for their excellence. Performing, composing, discussing, and listening to music develop that kind of appreciation. Experimental programs based on the content of this document are being performed in several Chicago high schools. The required program includes English, science, mathematics, foreign language, music, art, and physical education. Instruction involves intensive reading and discussion of the reading by students.

The Basic Academic Competencies,[2] published by the College Board, places the arts on an equal footing with other academic subjects, a true first in the history of prestigious publications concerned with American education. In the view of the panel established by the College Board for the Educational Equality Project, the arts: "challenge and extend human experiences," represent "a unique record of diverse cultures," provide "distinctive ways of understanding human being and nature," represent "creative modes by which all people can enrich their lives by their own self expression and by response to the expression of others," and "enhance the quality of living, engage the imagination, foster flexible ways of thinking, develop disciplined effort, and build self-confidence."

Ernest L. Boyer, the author of the report published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*,[3] supports education in the arts with these words:

> The Arts are an essential part of human experience; they are not a frill. We recommend that all students study the arts to discover how human beings use nonverbal symbols and communicate not only with words but also through music, dance, and the visual arts.

The concept of aesthetic education has affected the thinking of music educators during the past thirty or so years. I am at least partially responsible for the emphasis on aesthetic education. That concept has provided a focus for the graduate program at

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2. *Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do*. (New York: The College Board, 1983).

3. *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America*. By Ernest L. Boyer for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).

the University of Illinois for the past thirty-four years. It has been a useful focus, a valid focus, and a needed focus. It has served the University of Illinois graduate program and the profession well.

I have consistently taken the position that aesthetic considerations should pervade instruction in music. This means the use of real music in instruction; the best material for music instruction is music itself. It means that the expressive import of music merits primary emphasis in instruction. Music bereft of its expressive import has no significant meaning; the study of music's structure and history must be carried on not as separate subjects but as means to enhanced appreciation of expressive import of music.

I began emphasizing aesthetic education more than thirty years ago in *Education*, a now-defunct journal, with an article titled "Music Education: Aesthetic Education."

At the time of publication of that article and during the intervening years, I never anticipated that the concept of aesthetic education would come to be used as the major tenet in the justification for music education. That has, however, happened. As a result, the profession has been sated with vague esoteric statements of justification that no one understands, including, I suspect, most of the people who make those statements.

A Statement of Purpose

Establishing a realistic rationale requires that we accomplish two related but discrete tasks: establish a justification for the music program that will be understandable and convincing to laypersons, including school board members, administrators, parents, and the public at large, and establish guidelines for the organization and conduct of the music program that will result in ongoing demonstration of our ability to achieve the results implicit in our justification and, at the same time, be consistent with the unique character of music and musical experience.

With regard to the first task, I bring for your consideration eleven statements having to do with benefits of participation in the music program. Some of these benefits are intrinsic to music; others are instrumental in nature and extrinsic to music. I begin with a prefatory statement having to do with the cultural importance of music, a statement the essence of which, I believe, should undergird and permeate our effort to justify the place of music in the American educational system: *Music is a significant part of the cultural heritage. Music educators are the agents for the*

preservation, refinement, and transmission of that heritage to each succeeding generation of Americans.

The following benefits accrue from participation in the music program.

1. Participation in the music program inducts all students into a unique system of nonverbal symbols through which the noblest thoughts and feelings of human beings have been expressed and can be communicated. The ability to make and use symbols is the distinctive trait of the human mind. We have developed verbal symbols that constitute language, numerical symbols that constitute mathematics, and a variety of symbol systems that constitute the arts. A whole world of human achievement exists outside the realm of verbal and mathematical symbols. Music, a truly unique symbol system, has enabled human beings to express their loftiest thoughts and feelings about all that makes life worth living—love in its myriad forms, religion, patriotism, and nature. An educational program that neglects the rich and powerful system of symbols found in music is barren and incomplete.

2. Participation in the music program engages the imagination and creativity of all students and enables them to cultivate their imaginative potential that contributes greatly to the richness of living. The contemporary world is becoming increasingly mechanized and computerized. Every passing year sees a greater premium placed on predictability, standardization control, and rule-governed behavior. The current trend to emphasize the basics will almost surely result in emphasis on didactic instruction and memoriter or rote learning. As a result, the atmosphere of the school will become increasingly anti-esthetic and anti-imaginative. A music program that serves as a spur to the imagination and a stimulus to feeling is essential to the overall development of children and youth.

3. Participation in the music program enables all students to discover their level of musical talent. Giftedness involves talents of many types including verbal, mathematical, musical, athletic, and artistic. A major thrust in the current pursuit of excellence in education is to provide for the education of the gifted child. The very future of the economy and culture of the United States depends on the identification of the gifted, which is a major responsibility of the system of public education. The identification and nurturing of the musically gifted are essential to continuing enrichment of the American culture, and the music program can contribute greatly to that end.

4. Participation in the music program enables all students to develop their musical talent and musicianship to the highest possible level. Musical talent, like all human abilities, is distributed among the population in varying degrees, but all children possess an innate responsiveness to music and can find satisfaction in experience with music. The development of that talent and responsiveness, regardless of level, provides a basis for attainment of the good life of which music and musical experience are important ingredients.

The music program has a special responsibility for the nurturing of students with high levels of talent. The results of a doctoral dissertation recently completed at the University of Illinois to determine influential forces in the careers of professional singers established that experiences gained in the school music program and reinforcement from music educators were highly positive influences in the development of the singers.

5. Participation in the music program reveals to all students the richness and breadth of our musical heritage. It also facilitates the preservation and transmission of that heritage. The American musical heritage is rich and varied. It includes art music and folk music from the myriad of cultures that are represented in the population of the United States. The heritage mirrors and reveals the soul of the people in those cultures, their yearnings, their aspirations, their modes of perceiving themselves, their distinctive values, and their way of life.

Through the media, Muzak, and recordings, commercial music pervades the lives of Americans. The music is, however, limited in style, soporific in effect, and often suspect in its purpose. American public education, which is responsible for the transmission of the total culture, cannot forsake the transmission of the musical heritage.

6. Participation in the music program prepares our people to participate meaningfully in the rites and rituals of the society.

It is difficult to imagine and devastating even to contemplate a society bereft of music. Public and private events would indeed be routine and lifeless without the imaginative appeal of music. Marriage and funeral rites, the rituals of the churches, patriotic celebrations, love affairs, and yes, even athletic events gain enriched meaning and significance as the result of the presence of appropriate music.

Where other than in the public school music program can all the children of all the people be provided with the opportunity to

develop the musical skills that enable them to participate in these rites and rituals? No other agency, public or private, can achieve this result.

7. Participation in the music program provides all students with the opportunity to develop resources for a rewarding personal life and for positive social interaction. Music provides an ideal focus for lifelong learning and for the worthy use of leisure time in personal and social settings. The person who has developed musical skills and a basis for making informed musical choices is in a position to control the quality of his or her musical life and to make that life a matter of choice, not a matter of chance.

Playing an instrument, singing, and listening to appealing music all add a satisfying dimension to the good life. These activities are feasible only when the school music program develops the basic musical skills and understandings that people need to use music for their own satisfaction, to play in school and community bands and orchestras, to sing in school, community, and church choirs; and to contribute to the musical life of the school and the community.

Through participation in school music performing groups, students learn to cooperate for common goals, the essence of a democratic society. Each member of a performing group uses his or her musical abilities to contribute to the success of the group effort. In the school, this kind of cooperative effort takes place only in music and athletics. Music's advantage lies in its being accessible to everyone, not only during the school years but for a lifetime.

8. Participation in the music program provides a means to the development of self-confidence. Success in musical achievement, which is possible to a degree for all students, represents a powerful means to ego satisfaction and the development of self-confidence. Appearing successfully in public and school performances as a soloist or a contributing member of a group enhances students' feelings of worth. This value of participating in bands, orchestras, choruses, small ensembles, and music classes affects all students. For students lacking intellectual prowess or athletic ability, music may be the principal means to develop self-confidence.

9. Participation in the music program provides a focus for disciplined effort. Participation in performance groups and music

classes provides motivation for and requires disciplined effort and systematic work pointed toward the achievement of a worthy goal. The relationship between disciplined effort and successful achievement is dramatically demonstrated in experience gained in school choirs, bands, orchestras, and solo performance.

10. Participation in the music program admits students to a creative mode by which they can enrich their lives through self-expression and response to the expression of others.

Man is unique among earthly creatures in his ability and desire to express his feelings, his hopes, his yearning, his innermost being. Music is an ever present means to such self-expression. Self-expression through music runs the gamut from the happy singing of a child at play to the compositional output of a Beethoven.

The school music program provides students with the skills and understandings useful in refining their own self-expression through music and in responding to and appreciating the broad range of music that represents the creative achievement of composers, past and present.

11. The music program enlivens the spirit of the students and the school as a whole. The direct effect of music on feelings of both performers and listeners makes it a powerful force in the development of school spirit. The assembly sing, the band playing and marching at football games and at patriotic celebrations, the orchestra, band, and choral groups performing at commencement, at celebrations of holidays, in concerts, and in musicals all serve to enrich the experience of schooling. Is there inconsistency between these statements of justification and the concept of aesthetic education? My answer is a resounding "No!"

The concept of aesthetic education, however, applies to the *process* of music education, the teaching and learning of music. It calls for a return to the real basics of music education, the development of the ability of all students in the school to use music for self-expression. The primary role of the music program—as for all arts programs—is to stimulate feelingful thought and thoughtful feeling, processes in which the imagination is freed, is stimulated, and takes flight. These are the human values of music education. In this role, music education will be in a position to counter the sterility, the depersonalization, the retreat into isolation that pervade contemporary society. In this role, music education will be valued and supported by students and by the public.

A Few Caveats for the Future

We must not dehumanize the music program by making it an academic discipline, a repository of information that can be qualified and tested objectively.

We must not fall victim to the siren call of the computer, which, with all of its potential, remains only a sophisticated machine useful in drill on and testing of information.

We must develop in the high school as an alternative to performance groups a course in the literature and structure of music that will be accepted as a humanities course for college admission.

We must glory in the fact that music is different from other subjects in the school and requires a different form of evaluation than objective tests of information accumulated by students.

I suggest the following criteria for evaluating the music program:

1. Do we provide opportunity for *all* students to participate in learning experiences with music?
2. Do we develop usable skills: the ability to sing, to sing in parts, to read music, to play some instrument by ear and from notation?
3. Do we identify talented students and provide special opportunities for development of their talent?
4. Does the music program enhance the spirit of the individual students, the school, and the community?
5. Does the program raise the level of students' self-esteem of their musical ability?
6. Does the program produce students who have a basis for making reasoned choices about the role of music in their lives?
7. Do students use music as a means of self-expression in school and outside of it?
8. Do they value the expressions other students, amateur and professional performers, and a broad range of composers?
9. Do they seek further opportunities for musical experience in school, at home, and in the community?

Gathering evidence of our success in meeting these criteria will provide justification that will be convincing to school administrators and the public.

Our Mission

Responsiveness to music is taught by example and learned by contagion. Only to the extent that we, as music teachers, are

moved by the expressive import of music, can we lead our students to that import. We must have a firm belief in and demonstrate in our own lives the power and beauty of the art of music. Only then can we fulfill our mission as music educators—to touch the hearts, stir the feelings, and kindle the imaginations of our students.

If we accept this mission and put it into practice, if we realize that music operates in the realm of feeling and can educate for humanness in an increasingly mechanistic and depersonalized society, music will no longer be considered a frill; it can operate as a core subject lying at the heart of the school curriculum. The music program will achieve the results established in our justification for the program. Music will truly be basic.

A Selected List of MENC Publications

Eclectic Curriculum in American Music Education: Contributions of Dalcroze, Kodály, and Orff. Beth Landis and Polly Carder. Delineates principles and teaching procedures of three major European musician-educators. 1972. 147 pages. $8.00(M); $10.00.

History of Public School Music in the United States. Edward Bailey Birge. No music library is complete without this classic! Traces the history of music education. An exact reprinting of the 1937 edition. 1985. 323 pages. $7.50(M); $9.00.

Music and Music Education: Data and Information. Tables and charts display the latest data from a variety of sources. 1984. 63 pages. $12.00(M); $14.50.

The Future of Musical Education in America. Published by the Eastman School of Music Press of the University of Rochester, New York. Proceedings of the July 1983 conference cosponsored by Eastman and MENC. Full texts of all speeches. 1984. 90 pages. $9.95(M); $12.50.

Study of Music in the Elementary School—A Conceptual Approach. Prepared by the MENC Elementary Commission: Flavis Evenson, chairperson; Charles L. Gary, editor. A guide for teaching music through the conceptual approach. 1967. 182 pages. $5.50(M); $7.00.

Becoming Human through Music. Explore different musical cultures as you take an armchair tour of the world! Complete papers from the Wesleyan Symposium on the Perspectives of Social Anthropology in the Teaching and Learning of Music, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. 1985. 134 pages. $12.00(M); $14.50.

Documentary Report of the Ann Arbor Symposium: Applications of Psychology to the Teaching and Learning of Music. Sponsored by MENC and the University of Michigan and supported by the Presser Foundation. Twenty-four eminent music educators and psychologists relate psychology to improved classroom practices. 1981. 372 pages. $15.00(M); $18.75.

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